

RESPONSE PLAN TO A DEATH WHICH AFFECTS THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

MISSOULA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
April 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. MCPS 3422 Suicide Prevention Policy	3
2. MCPS 3423 Response to the Suicide of a Student or Staff Member Policy	4
3. MCPS 3423P Procedures Following the Suicide Death of a Student or Staff Member	5
4. MCPS 3424 Death of A Student or Staff Member Policy	6
5. MCPS 3424P Procedures Following the Death of a Student or Staff Member	7
6. MCPS 3425 Commemoration Guidelines for Death of Student or Staff Policy	8
7. MCPS 3425P Procedures for Commemorating the Death of a Student or Staff Member	9
8. INTRODUCTION	10
9. Response Plan First Day	10
10. Response Plan Second & Subsequent Days	12
11. Appendix A: School Faculty/Staff Crisis Meeting.....	13
12. Appendix B: Staff Roles During a Crisis	14
13. Appendix C: Classroom Activities	15
14. Appendix D: Teacher Response to Students	16
15. Appendix E: Debriefings	17
16. Appendix F: Developmental Tasks	18

STUDENTS

Suicide Prevention

The District will provide a comprehensive suicide education program within the context of K-12 Health Enhancement curriculum. The School District will ensure that administrators, support staff and other school staff are adequately trained in early identification and crisis intervention with suicidal youth. Referrals should be made to counseling staff within the school who will determine the course of action.

Policy History:

Adopted on: December 9, 2003

Policy revision to PN&P Committee on August 29, 2007

First Reading, September 11, 2007

Posted for Public Input until October 24, 2007

Policy revision to PN&P Committee on October 31, 2007

Adopted on: November 13, 2007

STUDENTS

Response to the Suicide of a Student or Staff Member

It is crucial in responding to the suicide death of a member of the MCPS community that intervention is immediate and follows the procedures set forth. Response shall include: implementing the building crisis plan, providing support for staff and students, arranging for additional professional intervention if needed and providing aftercare support for faculty, staff, students and families.

Policy History:

Proposed at August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee Meeting on first reading.

First Reading, September 11, 2007

Posted for Public Input until October 24, 2007

Proposed at October 31, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting for second reading.

Adopted on: November 13, 2007

STUDENTSProcedures Following the Suicide Death of a Student or Staff Member

The District is to ensure that administrators, support staff and other school staff are adequately trained in crisis intervention and have a crisis response plan developed.

Following are the procedures for MCPS schools to follow in the event of the suicide death of a student/staff member:

- ✓ The building principal will mobilize the building crisis team and notify the District Superintendent, Safe Schools Director, and all other MCPS principals.
- ✓ Meet with the team, as soon as possible, and devise a plan. Included in the plan is a scripted announcement about the death with input from the victim's family. This should be a formal acknowledgement of the loss in a sensitive and respectful way, without sensationalizing the incident.
- ✓ Mobilize the building staff (including kitchen and custodial staffs and ancillary workers such as Flagship) using the school phone tree. No building employee should come to the school without knowledge of the death. Hold an emergency faculty meeting to discuss procedures for the day and relay facts about the death.
- ✓ Attendance accountability in every class and activity must be maintained. Students may be excused with parental permission but absent students should be identified with a call to their parents as soon as possible.
- ✓ Routine is important and the school's operation should remain as normal as possible remembering that for many staff/students, it provides stability and a source of comfort. No major curricular expectations such as tests or teaching of new material should be given to students immediately following the incident and until approved by the crisis team.
- ✓ The school counselor, psychologist, or social worker should follow the deceased's schedule for a day to provide support to students and staff.
- ✓ Students in need of support should be referred to the counseling staff or allowed to congregate in areas with staff supervision. Teachers should excuse these students from class but not let them leave the classroom unescorted.
- ✓ All media should be referred to the building principal.
- ✓ School staff should meet daily, as determined by building administration and school crisis team to informally debrief and strategize as necessary.
- ✓ Nothing should be done to glamorize or dramatize a suicide. Students should be given opportunities to express their emotional response. Appropriate memorials are defined in MCPS' BP 3425 – Commemoration Guidelines for Death of Student or Staff.

Procedure History:

Presented at the August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting for review.

Approved on: November 13, 2007

STUDENTS

Death of a Student or Staff Member

It is the policy of Missoula County Public Schools to make every effort to provide support to the staff and students of a school when a death of a student or school staff member has occurred. This issue will be addressed by: offering help and assistance in implementing the building crisis plan; providing support and/or counseling by school personnel for staff and students; arranging for additional professional intervention if needed, and providing aftercare support for faculty, staff, students and families after a death has occurred.

Policy History:

Proposed at PN&P Committee Meeting – November 19, 2003

First Reading, December 9, 2003

Posted for public input – December 16, 2003

Approved on: February 10, 2004

Presented for first reading of revisions at the August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting.

First Reading, September 11, 2007

Posted for Public Input until October 24, 2007

Presented for second reading of revisions at the October 31, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting.

Adopted on: November 13, 2007

STUDENTS

Procedures Following the Death of a Student or Staff Member*

The District is to ensure that administrators, support staff and other school staff are adequately trained in crisis intervention and have a crisis response plan developed.

Following are the procedures for MCPS schools to follow in the event of the death of a student/staff member:

- ✓ The building principal will mobilize the building crisis team and notify the District Superintendent, Safe Schools Director, and all other MCPS principals.
- ✓ Meet with the team, as soon as possible, and devise a plan. Included in the plan is a scripted announcement about the death with input from the victim's family. This should be a formal acknowledgement of the loss in a sensitive and respectful way, without sensationalizing the incident.
- ✓ Mobilize the building staff (including kitchen and custodial staffs and ancillary workers such as Flagship) using the school phone tree. No building employee should come to the school without knowledge of the death. Hold an emergency faculty meeting to discuss procedures for the day and relay facts about the death.
- ✓ Attendance accountability in every class and activity must be maintained. Students may be excused with parental permission but absent students should be identified with a call to their parents as soon as possible.
- ✓ Routine is important and the school's operation should remain as normal as possible remembering that for many staff/students, it provides stability and a source of comfort. No major curricular expectations such as tests or teaching of new material should be given to students immediately following the incident and until approved by the crisis team.
- ✓ The school counselor, psychologist, or social worker should follow the deceased's schedule for a day to provide support to students and staff.
- ✓ Students in need of support should be referred to the counseling staff or allowed to congregate in areas with staff supervision. Teachers should excuse these students from class but not let them leave the classroom unescorted.
- ✓ All media should be referred to the building principal.
- ✓ School staff should meet daily, as determined by building administration and school crisis team to informally debrief and strategize as necessary.

*To be used in the case of a non-suicide death.

Procedure History:

Presented at August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting for review.

Approved on: November 13, 2007

STUDENTS

Commemoration Guidelines for Death of Student or Staff

This policy applies to all deaths, including suicide.

The process of commemorating the death of anyone in the school community is an important part of healthy grieving. Commemoration promotes the transition from grief to healing. There are, however, considerations about memorials in a school community.

“The concept of “exposure” or physical proximity to reminders is supported by many years of research. Memorials to commemorate the deceased need to be moved out of the school environment into the community where they can either be easily accessed by those who need their comfort and benefits or easily avoided by those who are activated by the “reminders.” Community memorials provide the same benefits as school memorials while avoiding the many conflicts and challenges created by memorials erected in closed environments such as schools.” (The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children.)

Based upon the knowledge of traumatic exposure as well as the complexity of school systems and school populations, MCPS will allow memorials as directed in this policy, but will look to the larger community to make the memorial a community memorial. Any memorials as the result of a death by suicide are extremely risky and the procedures for this policy should be followed exclusively.

Memorial services will not be conducted in the school setting unless extenuating circumstances exist, whereby the exception must be approved by the District Superintendent/designee. Under no circumstances should the media be present.

Policy History:

Presented for first reading at the August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting.

First Reading, September 11, 2007

Posted for Public Input until October 24, 2007

Presented for second reading at the October 31, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting.

Brought back to PN&P Committee for further review on November 28, 2007.

Further review at PN&P Committee meeting on January 30, 2008.

Adopted on: February 12, 2008

STUDENTSProcedures for Commemorating the Death of a Student or Staff Member

- Yearbook and student newspaper memorials will follow protocol outlining issues that journalists and others should follow when reporting about suicide. It should be understood that a scientific basis exists for concerns that irresponsible reporting or memorializing can contribute to additional suicides.
- Memorializing a student or staff person who has died by suicide or in a questionable manner such as self-administration of illicit or illegal drugs or involvement in other criminal activity shall not be allowed in ways other than those listed below.
- Yearbooks will not contain memorial pages dedicated to a single person who has died. Any questions about memorializing should be immediately discussed with the District Superintendent/designee.
- No funeral, memorial services or celebrations of an individual's life will be held on school properties.
- Student or staff attendance at funerals, memorial services or celebrations in the community is supported and encouraged when appropriate. Guidelines for student absences will be followed.
- Clothing with the deceased person's picture may not be worn at school. No memorial websites may be designed or displayed at school.
- Private expressions of grief by students or school staff such as cards, poems, or art will be given to the student's counselor for approval then delivered to the family by the counselor or school administrator, rather than being displayed at school.

Suggested Ideas for Appropriate Commemoration

- Raise funds to provide training to students, teachers and/or parents on such topics as assisting adolescents with problem solving, decision-making or stress management
- Encourage students and peers to talk about the person without idealizing them
- Express grief through art, writing, music
- Donate to the Missoula Education Foundation.
- Establish a memorial scholarship in the student's name *
- Purchase of library books, school supplies or equipment (the deceased person's name may be included) with the approval of the principal *
- Make monetary donations to a school activity or department (the deceased person's name may be included) with approval of the principal*

* These practices are not allowed if the student or employee died by suicide. The same will apply to deaths while involved in drug-related or other criminal activity.

A Memorial Book will be established at the Administration Building as a central documenting place for families to honor a deceased staff member, student or community member. This memorial book will provide a place for written commemoration and will serve as a historic record for the District. Monetary contributions will also be documented in the Memorial Book.

Any commemorations outside of these guidelines must be approved by the District Superintendent/designee.

Procedure History:

Presented at August 29, 2007 PN&P Committee meeting for discussion.

Brought back to PN&P Committee on November 28, 2007 for further review.

Further review at PN&P Committee meeting on January 30, 2008.

Approved on: February 12, 2008

INTRODUCTION

It is essential to provide a respectful, healing response to the death of a colleague or a student. The following response plan provides an outline of needed services.

Preparation for a Crisis:

1. Each school must have a phone tree in place to notify staff of a death before their arrival at school. The building principal is responsible for providing and maintaining the staff phone tree. Each staff member has two copies - One for home and one for school. Each staff member has a copy of the Response Plan to a Death handbook.
2. The school principal is to review the response plan with staff in the first month of every school year.
3. The school has a crisis response team.*
4. The team is to identify "safe" rooms for exclusive use during a crisis. For example:
 - a. Administrative area/offices and Conference Room for Crisis Response Team
 - b. Counseling area for needs of students
 - c. Teachers Lounge for teachers and staff
 - d. Designated room for parents

Crisis Response Team:

1. Each school's response team is to have knowledge about the steps to be taken in the event of a crisis and is to provide information, resources and techniques for assisting individuals and groups with grief and loss.
2. The team is to determine the need for formal critical incident debriefings and how to conduct them. (See Appendix E)

Teams should be limited to 8-12 members and composed of the Principal, assistant principal(s), counselor(s), school social worker, school psychologist, teacher(s), school nurse, custodian, principal's secretary and others as appropriate.

At the beginning of the school year the crisis response team will provide an in-service training to faculty/staff on the crisis response plan.

Response Plan (before, during or after school):

Special Note: The Principal or designee contacts Coroner or family to determine what information family will allow to be released.

First Day:

1. Person with knowledge of current crisis/death contacts administrator at involved school.
2. Principal initiates telephone tree informing all crisis response team members of crisis/death and informs of crisis team meeting time and place. If calls go out in the evening or on the weekend, the meeting is held the next day of school or sooner if circumstances warrant. All MCPS Principals should be notified.

3. Principal or person in charge - calls the District Superintendent/Designee- who will come to the school and act as the "Thinking Assistant" to the person in charge.
 - a. The District Superintendent/Designee will be with the person in charge as a support.
 - b. The District Superintendent/Designee will be at all meetings and act as an advisor.
4. Principal advises crisis response team to contact all staff through phone tree to inform of crisis and schedule staff meeting. All District Principals should be notified.
5. Principal convenes crisis response team meeting at earliest possible time prior to the morning staff meeting to determine the following needs:
 - a. Initiate family contact (principal or designee).
 - b. If information received about the incident is incomplete or conflicting, principal or designee may contact county coroner's office for information (with permission of family of victim(s) and/or utilize School Resource Officer to obtain information.
 - c. Prepare statement to read to staff. (suggested script page 13).
 - d. Determine what information about crisis will be given to student body and how it will be presented (prepare statement for students).
 - e. Determine resources for staff, students & families (consultation, gathering place, food, coffee, etc.).
 - f. Decide if other community personnel will be needed (Hospice, therapists, etc.).
 - g. Decide if any schedule changes are needed for both academic & extra curricular activities.
 - h. Create a plan to address students who will come to your school from other schools because they knew the victim.
6. Convene a school staff meeting.
7. A response team member, appointed by building principal, will go to each class and activity which the deceased student or staff member participated in (to address concerns). Response team members will also attend other classes as needed or requested.
8. Counselors take referrals of at-risk or overly distraught students. Inform principal if extra help is needed and principal seeks assistance from other district schools.
9. Attendance clerk accounts for all absent students and provides list of students with unexcused absences to counseling staff at the beginning of each period. Assign extra help to the attendance clerk if necessary. Counselors will then locate students and/or parents to check on students' safety.
10. Counseling team works with family and other parents as needed.
11. Principal conducts a staff meeting after school to informally debrief, evaluate, and prepare for the next day. Crisis response team will offer staff support and solicit additional referrals for high-risk students.
12. Crisis response team convenes for additional planning.

Second and Consecutive Days:

1. Support rooms still available.
2. Continue monitoring high-risk students; continue staff support. Check attendance and account for all absent students, notifying parents of any students who are not excused.
3. Announce to students and staff the funeral/memorial service arrangements. Immediately following the funeral/memorial service, Crisis Response Team will be available to staff and students. Designated school staff members should attend the service to provide support to students who also attend.
4. Class counselor and/or principal will gather personal belongings and the principal or designee will return the belongings to family at appropriate time. Name of the deceased is to be removed from all data banks to prevent future mailings to the family (no sooner than 2 days following notification of the event).
5. Crisis response team will evaluate situation and make arrangements for long term follow-through (groups, classroom discussions, outside referrals, etc.).
6. Crisis response team will work with staff/students to determine appropriate commemorations of the incident at school.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL FACULTY/STAFF CRISIS MEETING:

1. All building staff should be in attendance.
2. The Principal will give information about the incident along with a written announcement to be read to first class of the day using this example: Student's name died last night (or depending upon the family's wishes this may say "took his/her own life last night"). At this time we do not know when the services will be. We will let you know more information when we are notified.
3. Verify that each teacher has a crisis response manual and review contents briefly. Refer to Appendix "C" for classroom management suggestions.

The Principal will announce the following staff expectations:

- Teachers in need of classroom help should notify Principal. Recognize that substitute staff and others not receiving earlier notification may be in need of assistance.
 - Announce that teachers are to take roll at the beginning of each period and report to attendance office as soon as possible.
 - Suspend teaching of new material and testing for that day or longer depending on the impact to that class.
 - Identify students who were close friends or students who may need to be seen by a counselor. Identify students obviously in distress and talk with them or have another student escort them to a group or individual counseling area. **Do not let students leave your classroom alone.**
 - **Keep all other students in class; do not let them wander in the building.** (If you see groups of students gathering and talking about the situation, intervene and notify administrators if necessary.) If you need assistance call the school secretaries.
4. Inform locations of parent, staff and student support areas.
 5. All staff not assisting students should be in hallways and restrooms at passing time.
 6. Inform staff of plans to address students who will come to school from other schools because they knew the victim.
 7. Inform the District Superintendent/designee of any key information about the crisis as soon as possible.
 8. Direct all media to Principal, Superintendent/designee or Public Relations Officer.

APPENDIX B

STAFF ROLES DURING A CRISIS

ADMINISTRATION (Includes Superintendent/Designee, Principal, Assistant Principal, & Deans)

- Contact District Superintendent
- Remain highly visible
- Address public relations issues
- Communicate with the media
- Chair crisis team
- Seek additional staff support as needed
- Communicate with staff
- Liaison between staff, parents & school district administration

COUNSELORS, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST & SOCIAL WORKER

- Provide counseling for students
- Coordinate all counseling activities
- Communicate with faculty
- Identify those students considered at-risk and make appropriate arrangements for them
- Obtain attendance lists and follow up with students/parents to verify
- Seek additional counseling support from other schools and community agencies as needed by conferring with principal
- Communicate with parents as needed or requested
- Provide support to staff
- Follow the deceased's schedule for the first day (and second day if needed)
- Coordinate with appropriate community agencies as needed
- Arrange for debriefing in conjunction with principal (See Appendix E)
- Receive and review note/memorials from students to the family. Arrange delivery of personal school items to the family.

TEACHERS

- Attend all meetings as requested by principal
- Announce events to students
- Take attendance at the beginning of every period in every class
- Lead class discussion (call for assistance if needed)
- Identify students in need of counseling and refer to school counseling staff
- Generate activities to reduce impact of trauma (talking, letters, poetry, journals, etc.)

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AFTER A LOSS (In no particular order)

- 1) Write a eulogy.
 - 2) Write stories about the victim.
 - 3) Debate controversial issues.
 - 4) Investigate laws governing similar incidents.
 - * 5) Discuss ways to cope with traumatic situations.
 - *6) Discuss the responses of grief and the different ways people have of grieving.
 - * 7) Start a new school activity. For example: a SADD unit if a child was killed by a drunk driver.
 - * 8) Encourage students to keep a journal of events and of their reactions.
 - * 9) Place a collection box in the class for notes to the family.
 - *10) Discuss alternatives for coping with depression, if suicide is involved.
 - *11) Discuss why people take drugs and suggest ways to help abusers, if substance abuse related.
 - *12) Write a reaction paper.
 - *13) Write a "where I was when it happened" report.
 - 14) Discuss historical precedents about issues related to crisis.
 - * 15) Encourage mutual support.
 - *16) Discuss and prepare children for funeral (what to expect, people's reactions, what to do, what to say).
 - *17) Direct energy to creative pursuits, physical exercise, or verbal expression when anger arises.
 - *18) Discuss the benefits of self care in stressful situations. Give examples.
 - 19) Create a class story relevant to the issue.
 - * 20) Each department put together a possible plan for the day that may include some of the above, but a way to give students a chance to remain busy.
 - *21) Discuss the different ways various cultures honor their dead.
- * The only interventions recommended in death by suicide.**

APPENDIX D

THINGS A TEACHER CAN SAY OR DO TO HELP A STUDENT COMING BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER A DEATH

- 1) Talk to the student about what he/she may want the class to know about the death and who should tell them.
- 2) Find a safe place that the student can go during the school day, at recess, at lunch or during class if he/she wants some time alone.
- 3) Find a safe person that the student can go to during the day if he/she is upset, e.g. counselor, Dean or nurse.
- 4) Encourage the student to answer questions only when he/she feels like it. If the student does not want to answer, suggest that they say, "I'd rather not talk about that right now."
- 5) Encourage the student to write about feelings, thoughts and/or memories during the school day when needed, especially during times the student is not able to concentrate on school work. Offer crayons and a blank drawing book to a younger child.
- 6) Negotiate, on an ongoing basis, homework and classroom assignment expectations. Grief takes tremendous physical and emotional energy. It will take time for the student to return to previous standards of performance.
- 7) Offer yourself as a listener to the student and/or refer to school counseling staff when needed.
- 8) Do long-term monitoring of at risk students and make appropriate counseling referrals.

APPENDIX E

Debriefings:

Informal Debriefing:

Informal debriefing should be done daily by the Crisis Response Team during the crisis to check-in with members of the team regarding stress management and the need for self-care. Informal debriefing can also be done with other members of the staff as needed. Team members, and any members of the staff having difficulty coping should be assisted with referrals to community mental health providers. School counseling staff, the school psychologist, and social worker should be consulted for referrals. The counseling staff should be mutually supportive and should be especially mindful of staff members who may be struggling and be accessible to them. Students have ongoing access to the counseling staff and can be informally debriefed by counseling staff in classrooms or small groups in the counseling center.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing:

What is it?

Following any tragic death of a school member, a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) should be considered for teachers and staff and in some cases for students. The focus is to help individuals examine their thoughts about the experience, express their emotions, and manage stress. Groups normally consist of 15-20 participants and are provided by mental health professionals with specific training in crisis debriefing such as CISD or Red Cross crisis debrief. Another option is an educational debriefing during which a professional provides information about stress and self-care and which can be done for a large group.

When should it be held? 24-72 hours after the news of the incident is optimal, however, it may be done later depending on the situation and discretion of the CISD personnel. The debriefing should be done by a professional trained specifically in crisis debriefing and who has not been a part of the traumatic incident.

Who should attend?

All school staff who are directly affected by the death or serious incident involving a fellow teacher, staff member or student should attend the debriefing.

APPENDIX F

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Dealing With Death

When schools experience a crisis involving one or more deaths, everyone-adults and students alike-grieve the death of individuals as well as the inevitable changes that occur as a result of the loss. While we can prepare ourselves to manage crisis, nothing really prepares us for the grief experienced after death, and unfortunately, there are no quick fixes.

The information below is designed to equip educators and other caring adults with a basic understanding of how to effectively yet sensitively support kids when a death occurs.

Kids Dealing with Death Have a Right to:

- Know the truth about the death, the deceased, and the circumstances in accordance with family wishes and information available.
- Have questions answered honestly.
- Be heard with dignity and respect.
- Be silent, if they choose, and not share their grief emotions/thoughts.
- Not agree with adult perceptions or conclusions.
- Feel all their feelings and think the thoughts of their own unique grief.
- Not follow the “stages of grief” as outlined in textbooks.
- Have irrational guilt about how they could have intervened to stop the death.
- Be angry at death and the circumstances surrounding it.
- Be involved in rituals such as funerals and memorials outside of school.

Behaviors Indicating the Need for Professional Help:

- Suicidal thoughts or behaviors
- Chronic physical symptoms without organic findings
- Depression with impaired self-esteem
- Persistent denial of death with delayed or absent grieving
- Progressive isolation and lack of interest in any activity
- Persistent anger and hostility
- Intense preoccupation with memories of the deceased
- Prolonged changes in typical behavior
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and /or other drugs
- Prolonged feeling of guilt or responsibility for the death
- Major and continued changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Risk-taking behavior including identifying with the deceased in unsafe ways

Reactions Specific to Age Groups

Pre-school Children: Believe the world revolves around them and they “cause” things to happen; have no cognitive understanding of death and often experience it as abandonment; emotional and behavioral responses at this age are often brief but intense.

Common Behaviors: Changes in eating and sleeping patterns; frequently regress to earlier behaviors; want to be dressed or fed.

How to Help:

- Use honest and simple answers
- Be prepared to answer same question(s) over and over
- Support their play to act out grief
- Allow for anger, crying and safe physical expression of feelings
- Maintain consistent structure and routines
- Allow to act younger, regress for a while
- Hold, nurture, and provide physical attention
- Encourage and allow fun, happy times
- Have books on death and grief available
- Model by sharing personal anecdotes, as appropriate

Elementary School Students: Are concrete thinkers; question how life will be different, what will be the same, and how one knows a person is really dead; want to see death as reversible, but also beginning to understand it as final.

Common Behaviors: Regression to earlier behaviors; fighting, anger; difficulty in paying attention and concentrating; daydreaming; not completing homework assignments; sleepiness, come to school tired; withdrawal; not unusual for questions and play related to death to be graphic and gory.

How to Help:

- Answer questions as clearly and accurately as possible
- Help students identify and use available support systems
- Work with students around academic workload
- Allow for expression of feelings and emotions
- Provide appropriate art, journal, music and/or physical outlets for grief
- Maintain routines and structure but allow for flexibility
- Give student choices whenever possible
- Let students know you care and are thinking about them
- Create a “safe space” for students to go when needed

Middle School Students: Depending on level of maturity, may react as either an elementary or high school student. May comprehend death as final and unavoidable which may provoke feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and increased risk-taking behaviors.

Common Behaviors: Physical responses including headaches, stomach problems, sleep disturbances and changes in eating habits; argumentative; withdrawal; sullen; angry; tired; lack of concentration and attentiveness; may exhibit risk-taking behaviors and moodiness.

How to Help:

- Expect and accept mood swings
- Provide supportive environment where students can share, when needed
- Anticipate increased physical concerns including illness, body aches, and pains
- Answer questions honestly and provide factual information as available
- Allow some flexibility in completing school work
- Encourage physical outlets to release grief

High School Students: Are philosophical about life and death but believe it won't happen to them; appear to use "adult" approaches of problem solving and abstract thinking in order to deal with grief; may fight against emotional vulnerability caused by death because they want to be independent.

Common Behaviors: Withdrawal from parents and other adults; angry outbursts; increased risk-taking behaviors (substance use or abuse, reckless driving, sexual behaviors); pushing limits of rules; lack of concentration; inability to focus; crying; sleepiness, exhaustion; feel responsible for taking care of others.

How to Help:

- Be sensitive without rewarding "inappropriate drama"
- Allow for some regression and dependency
- Encourage appropriate expression of feelings such as sorrow, anger, guilt, and regret
- Understand and allow for variation in maturity level
- Answer questions honestly and provide factual information
- Avoid power struggles and allow choices
- Help student understand and resolve feelings of helplessness
- Allow for flexibility in completing school assignments
- Model appropriate responses

Adapted from:
Office of Safe & Drug Free Schools
Operation Military Kids/Resources